

**WORKERS' PARTY**

Spring 1987 £1

# **REPORT**



AFTER THE ELECTION  
**THE FIGHT GOES ON**

UNRAVELLING THE NATIONAL DEBT  
THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT  
NICARAGUA TODAY  
JOBS FROM CUTAWAY BOGS



Maurice Goldring



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# WORKERS' PARTY REPORT

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## SPRING 1987

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# THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

FIFTEEN years into the women's movement we face a rather contradictory situation. On one hand there have been substantial gains for women in a number of areas: equal pay and opportunities legislation; reform of many aspects of family law; greater access to various spheres of public life to name but a few.

But for hundreds of thousands of women these changes have meant very little, the material conditions of their lives have steadily worsened as the jobs crisis deepens and cuts in health and social welfare place intolerable burdens on them in their daily lives.

The gulf between the two realities raises very serious questions about the direction of the women's movement — using the term in its broadest sense — and its current priorities.

Does it have anything to offer women? Is it capable of influencing the broad economic and social policies which determine the quality of life for most women? And where does the Workers' Party fit into all this? What do we have to offer women, how are we different from other parties on the issue of women and how do we communicate this to women themselves?

This article attempts to arrive at some tentative responses to these questions and thereby generate some discussion on the topic.

## The modern Women's Movement:

The modern women's movement is a phenomenon of capitalist industrial societies in which the formal ideology of 'equality' is

contradicted at every turn by the reality of systematic and widespread discrimination.

The demand for equality between men and women is not, of course, a new one, but from its earliest days in the United States the new women's movement went beyond the traditional liberal feminism of the suffrage era. It extended the concept of equality beyond the formal political and civil sphere and into areas previously regarded as 'private': care of children, control of one's body and so on. Hence the famous slogan 'the personal is political'.

The new movement differed from the old in another important respect. Early feminism had sought for women a share in triumphant capitalism. The new movement, in contrast, was part of a wider critique of capitalism, a critique which had been growing in strength since the end of the second world war, and sharpened with the rise of the liberation movements, the student movement, anti-war groups and black power.

In Britain, also, many of the different strands were evident in the new women's movement, allied to a strong labour movement influence.

## The movement in Ireland:

This critical, anti-establishment perspective also informed the Irish women's movement which was developing by 1970, and which caused such controversy and uproar at the time. Yet the main demands of the movement seem very basic now: equal pay; equality before the law; equality in education; access to

contraception; one family — one house; justice for deserted wives, widows and single parents.

The movement in Ireland has always been essentially practical in its approach, oriented towards self-help and campaigning rather than, for instance, 'consciousness raising', which was so central to the American movement.

It has been effective in certain areas — equal pay and opportunities legislation for instance — due in no small part to trade union women who have always been an important component of the Irish movement.

## Fine Gael's Trojan horse

But another much more important element became influential in the women's movement quite early on. We had the Women's Representative Committee and the Commission on the Status of Women (later the Council for the Status of Women).

We also had the emergence of the Women's Political Association — essentially a kind of Fine Gael Trojan Horse, which captured much of the essential dynamism of the women's movement for reformist politics, leading large sections of the movement up a political cul-de-sac for which it is now, in my view, paying a heavy price.

The women's movement saw some of its most prominent members taking what seemed a logical step — entry into the formal political system where they could influence and shape national policies. Or so they thought. What happened of course is that in most cases they went into parties whose surface commitment to reform





cloaked a basic economic and social conservatism deeply antagonistic to the kind of fundamental changes required to further the cause of women. Conservative parties regenerated themselves on the backs of the women's movement, while the women activists were neutralised, muzzled and rendered increasingly ineffectual.

And so we had a Minister of Women's Affairs who had a lot to say about golf clubs and women entrepreneurs, but whose silence was deafening when it came to social welfare cuts. We have had a woman Minister presiding over the same cuts and indeed enthusiastically defending them.

We have women acquiescing in the capitulation of the main parties to sectarian bigots whenever the opinion polls show a warning light, and refusing to support action for the benefit of women, when it is proposed by the Workers' Party for instance.

### **Danger of de-politicisation:**

Such developments fuel the cynicism which characterises many people's view of our political system. For those activists still outside, the temptation is to withdraw from the political arena, to retreat into the comforting sisterhood of the single-issue campaign, the self-help group, the separatist

organisation, to at least minimise the chances of further betrayal.

But to de-politicise the women's question is to enter another cul-de-sac. It means being on the margins rather than at the centre. It carries the danger of increasing fragmentation so that sectional gains are made at the expense of other needy sections rather than of the powerful and wealthy. It is an important task for the Workers' Party to assert the political dimension of the women's question, to overcome the cynicism which views all political parties as essentially the same, and to fill the political vacuum that has opened up by demonstrating the close and necessary connection between the struggle for women's rights and the task of building socialism in this country.

### **Can WP do the job?**

This is a daunting task indeed if we have to start from scratch, but of course we don't have to. In fact a good deal of the ground work has already been done by the Workers' Party and we are quite well placed to undertake the job. Certainly there is no other party capable of doing so at the present time.

First of all our approach to the question of women is substantially different from that of the main parties. For us the oppression of women is not just an unfortunate

byproduct of the system which can be eradicated by piecemeal reforms which tinker around the edge of the system without altering its basis. It is built into the very foundations of capitalism and is crucial to its survival.

So the question of the liberation of women is fundamental to the socialist transformation of society and our commitment to women is not a matter of opportunistic reaction to the latest opinion poll, to be ditched when the polls show a swing.

Conversely, it is utterly futile to try to work for women's rights within parties whose main policies are constantly reinforcing economic and social inequalities.

Secondly the Workers' Party hasn't just been reacting to the women's movement of the past 15 years. We have ourselves been part of it and indeed have helped to shape it in a certain way. The Workers' Party was among the earliest to recognise the political and social significance of the emerging movement and to respond positively to it.

We developed policy over a wide range of issues related to women. We established our women's committee, initiated discussion and debate within the party and were involved in all crucial campaigns affecting women from the earliest



days of the women's movement. Our public representatives, both at local government and Dáil level, have consistently championed women's rights and raised issues and questions previously ignored. We have made continuous efforts to increase the number of women in the party. In the recent review of party organisation and structure we tried to build women's needs into the party from the ground up.

We have increased the numbers of women's groups linked to our constituency organisations. Yet we are all aware that there is no room for complacency in these matters but this should not prevent us recognising the very real progress that has been made.

Thirdly, the women's movement itself has developed and matured over the years. Many issues have now been clarified and the movement has undoubtedly created a whole new constituency for socialist policies.

Fourthly, many women outside what we generally regard as the women's movement are increasingly active in a wide range of issues.

They may be enduring the worst effects of recession but women are certainly no longer passive victims. Most of them would probably not describe themselves as feminists or socialists, or indeed as 'political', but there is no doubt that they represent a tremendous potential force for political progress.

### The priorities:

How then are we to proceed? It would seem that our work among women falls into the following categories:

- ★ work within the constituent parts of the women's movement, interpreted in the broadest possible way;
- ★ work among women traditionally outside the scope of the women's movement and bridging the gap between these and the rest of the women's movement;
- ★ work within the Workers' Party itself, directed at male as well as female members;
- ★ recruitment of women to the party and facilitating their full participation.

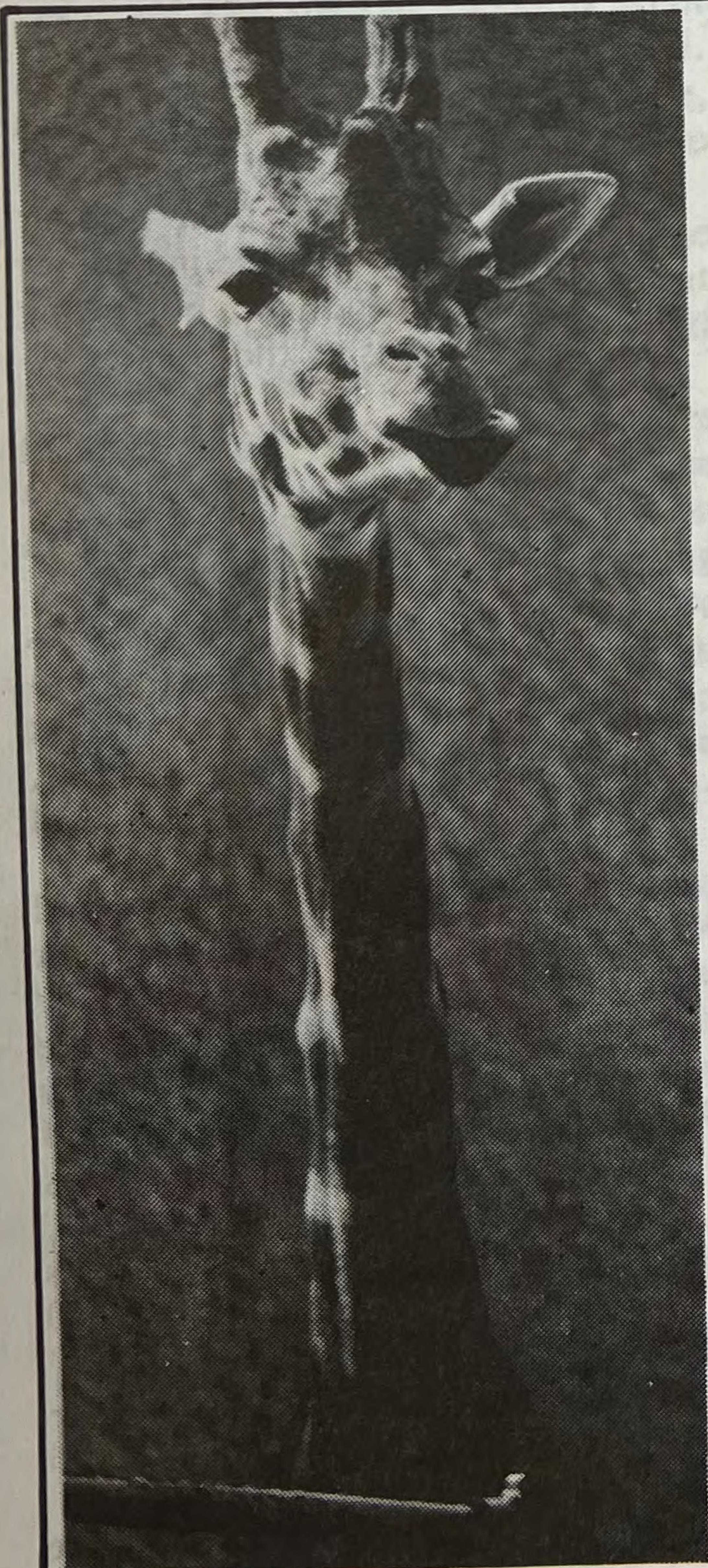
To a large degree these areas of work are inter-dependent. It will be

difficult for example to extend our work among women if we do not recruit substantially more women into the party. Equally, activity itself will attract members and supporters.

It is highly dangerous to select one particular area of activity as a priority, as none of the areas outlined above can be neglected. But at this particular time the single most important task for our party to undertake among women is to campaign actively at local level on issues affecting women.

Where possible this should be done mainly — but not exclusively — through women's groups. But any party branch can campaign effectively and shortage of women members should not prevent any branch from this work.

Full use should be made of our local authority representatives to publicise such campaigns. If this job is done properly, many of the others will fall into place, and it will be an enormous contribution towards building our party into the dominant political organisation of the Irish working class.



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WE'RE up to our necks in it according to the gurus of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and the PDs. Below, EAMONN SMULLEN, chairperson of the Workers' Party's Economic Affairs department unravels the mystique behind

# The goddam National Debt

IT IS NOT difficult to understand why our economy fails to prosper. What is happening is nearly always hidden behind a cloud of words — words which cannot immediately be understood — vested interests making a mystery out of simple things in order to deceive the multitude is a practice as old as the human race; every stone-age witch-doctor was well acquainted with the technique.

## New Policy?

It is also necessary to be aware of another establishment trick — old political and economic theory is constantly being re-cycled and presented as new. When a fair economic wind blows for capitalism — as it did internationally from the end of world war two until the early '70s — then anyone who suggests that it is in the nature of capitalism to have slumps as well as booms is ridiculed. Once again Marx is said to be wrong.

The economic theories of the post-war boom are now back in wraps, and early 1930's economic arguments are being re-run. Not many are around who remember the press of those days — for this reason the arguments may seem new. "Balance the Budget"; "get out of debt"; "a government of experts"; and "all parties coming together to 'do the right thing'." These arguments now come up every other day. All this is vintage 1930's stuff.

## Are cuts new?

James Ramsey MacDonald, Britain's first Labour Prime Minister in 1929, was, in 1930, persuaded by the Bank of England that he must 'balance the Budget' by cutting welfare benefits, the dole and public service pay.

MacDonald had by that time drifted some distance from his working-class roots. When some of his Cabinet colleagues could not stomach his proposed cuts he formed a "national government"

with the Tories and Liberals to force starvation on the working class.

A statement by Lenin cuts through all the posturing and clap-trap. He said, "Every cook must learn to run the State." What he meant was that cooks deal with real things and have a commonsense view of life. Above all else our financial problems need a commonsense examination.

What sense would a cook make of the National Debt?

If money is borrowed and then given away — free, gratis and for nothing — then debt will mount up and the interest on it will become intolerable. It is for this reason that we have the problem that now so concerns everyone. The cause of the problem is political — therefore the cure must be political. But what *kind* of politics, that is the question.

Everyone is agreed on one simple fact: our borrowing as a State is unhealthy because it amounts to too great a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product.

## Borrowing

It is important to be absolutely clear about one simple fact — borrowing is not in itself "evil". Borrowing becomes "evil" when the borrowed money is used simply to pay bills and meet running expenses — spending in a way that means there is no way of getting the money back, with interest.

If money is borrowed to finance development and the development produces profit (to use a common well-understood word) then the borrowed money will multiply itself and can be paid back, with interest, over a period of time.

The Workers' Party view of our debt burden, especially the foreign part of it, is unique on the political scene in this State. We say the size of the debt is not necessarily the problem; the problem is the smallness of the Gross Domestic Product and its failure to grow. The solution then is to expand the economy.

Expansion does not mean haphazard growth — that is an impossibility anyway — but the planned development of certain sectors. Before we examine this policy in detail we must first look at what the Coalition and Fianna Fáil say about the debt problem and how they propose to deal with it. We will also look at the economic reasons and vested interests which push the government and opposition in their announced direction.

## A cuts policy

In order to keep firmly in mind that the Coalition, Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats are advocating long discredited 1930s economic policies, we must take a brief look back again to 1930's Britain.

A committee known as "The May Committee" — called after its chairperson, not the month — was set up because of Tory and Liberal accusations that the then Labour Government was engaged in a policy of "wasteful spending", borrowing to meet the needs of the Unemployment Fund.

The Committee recommended new taxation amounting to £24 million a year and a reduction in expenditure of £96 million. Two-thirds of the recommended cuts were to be provided by cutting unemployment benefit by 20 per cent and cuts of 10 per cent in teachers', civil servants', police and servicemen's pay.

Now Coalition and Fianna Fáil are planning to reduce government spending by cutting outgoings — by £300 million in 1987 say the Coalition, by over twice as much say the CII. Both the government and Fianna Fáil are political expressions of the CII.

If that road is to be followed, cuts effectively to the value of £1,000 million need to be made. To 'cure' the problem by making cuts will ensure no more than the whole process in time starting all over again.

Private enterprise supporters take



**Table 1: Estimates 1986**

Social Welfare:	£1,362.3 million
Health:	£1,115.136 million
Direct Education Spending	£1,132.787 million
Total:	£3,610.223 million
Total services' spending:	£6,541.355 million

the view that the problem 'cured' in this way creates "a climate for investment" and that all will be well. There is, of course, no guarantee that matters would work out like that even if cuts to the value of £1,000 million were made next year.

### Cuts where?

The cuts will, no doubt, be made in the area of biggest spending no matter what is said in the short term. Table 1 gives some idea of the areas most likely to be attacked:

Health, social welfare and education services together make up more than half government spending on services. Total government (estimated) spending in the 1986 Budget year amounted to £8,042 million — something less than half of total government spending went on the three services we have listed.

The government and, of course, Fianna Fáil and the PDs are also keen to cut public service pay.

Total government revenue (income) in 1986 is estimated at £6,792 million. After that they had to borrow. (See Table 2).

The figures speak for themselves and outline the problem. The problem can be attacked in an establishment manner — by cutting public spending so as to make more money available to pay off the debt quickly. It can also be attacked by a policy of productive investment so as to quickly increase the size of the Gross National Product.

A cuts policy means more misery, especially for the needy. A productive investment policy means more jobs and, in this way, a bigger tax income for the government and a reduction in spending as workers come off social welfare and start to

**Table 2: Total government debt:**

Total Government internal (home) borrowing	£10,040.0 m
Total Government external (foreign) borrowing	£8,441.2 m
Total Government Debt:	£18,481.6 m
Borrowing required in 1986:	£2,001.0 m
Gross National Product:	£16,660.0 m

again pay tax.

### Pay claims

Every section of the working class seeking an increase in pay or cuts in tax are, and will be to an increasing extent, presented as 'enemies of the people'. The majority of the population — the working class — will be presented as 'enemies of us all'.

The truth of the matter, however, is that the unions *are* prepared to sit down with government and seriously discuss an incomes policy.

The Irish Congress of Trade

**Table 3: Government grants to private enterprise 1984/85:**

Direct aid	£420 m
Tax aid (tax concessions)	£170 m
Cost of special rate of tax on manufacturing profits	£437 m
Spending on agriculture	£428 m
Total (for listed items):	£1,455 m

Unions' study of the Jobs Crisis states this clearly. "*Congress accepts that genuine national economic planning must involve some planning of incomes. But it must cover all incomes — wages and salaries, incomes from self-employment, trading profit and rental income.*"

This offer from Congress is under the heading "Income Development". But what are the "other side" doing while the media, which they own and control, attack the unions?

### Lenders' market

At regular intervals one or another establishment politician says "We must create a climate for investment". They never complete the statement for fear of giving the

game away — "otherwise people with money (including natives) will not invest here".

Over the last few years we did have a lenders' market and this is still so.

Why do they not invest? The government needs to borrow a lot of money. This can be readily understood from the figures we have used already, when talking about service spending by the government. The government also spends directly to encourage private enterprise — which in Ireland is often neither private nor enterprising. (See Table 3).

All the outgoings show why the State is in the money borrowing market in a big way. Every time 'the market heats up' those with money say — "no higher interest rate — no money".

The people with money pocket their profits from safe loans and

investments, and enterprise which adds to the value of the Gross Domestic Product is not developed. This is a very serious matter.

### Debt burden

When the above facts of life are put together we can not only see clearly the seriousness of our economic situation; we also have the key to present establishment economic policy.

The Republic of Ireland has the largest burden of debt in relation to its GNP in the industrialised world. This means massive amounts of money, needed for investment, are sucked into interest repayments.

Interest repayments are in some ways a matter of luck — inflation, for example, can considerably reduce the repayment amount if inflation is high enough. It is one of the traps of borrowing when inflation was on the increase.

We must first examine another "radical" solution to our debt problem which has started to appear, before we look at various establishment solutions and the real reason behind what they suggest.



Repudiate the national debt? It is not possible to do this in the present political climate in Ireland. It would be an absolutely last option in any political situation. Repudiating the national debt would at once cause all overseas assets to be frozen. It would also become almost impossible to get credit — in the western world.

Most of our economy is geared to the western market and nearly all the spares for our machines and transport come from the same area. To be refused credit in the western world would, therefore, create more problems than it would solve.

### Establishment policy

Cuts made by the establishment — on the scale that even a strongly disapproving public opinion would allow — will not bring prosperity for all, even in the long-term. They know this very well. It is for this reason that certain establishment economists — mostly identifiable as Fianna Fáil — have started to float out and justify another establishment way of dealing with our problems.

These people say that with the exception of the 1960s, real economic growth in Ireland never rose above slightly less than 1.5 per cent per year. The average rate of economic growth in most industrial countries over the same period was 3 per cent.

Ireland answered this problem by a steady rate of emigration of one per cent per year. The establishment, therefore, regard this rate of emigration as desirable.

### Workers' Party plan

A little over three years ago the Workers' Party examined the growing crisis and produced a plan, "An End to the Crisis", sub-titled "A plan for recovery and full employment in the '80s".

Unemployment was then at a lower figure than now and the national debt was lower. In the economic circumstances of the time we laid down production targets which could have been reached over a stated period of years. (See Table 4).

At the centre of "An End to the Crisis" plan were two propositions:

- production rather than a spending plan is needed,
- State enterprise must be the engine of economic growth.

**Table 4: The production plan:**

Sector	% of GDP '82	annual average increase	Increase in output '83-'91
Agriculture	13¼%	+4%	42%
Industry:	37½%	+7½%	+90%
Services:	49¼%	+3½%	+34%

**Table 5: Repatriation**

	1980	1985
Profits, dividends, royalties	£258 m	£1,321 m
National Debt interest	£193 m	£795 m
Other interest	£832 m	£2,300 m

The establishment were opposed in principle to End to the Crisis because their commitment to a totally private enterprise economy is absolute. The establishment have *no answer* to the present crisis. Only an educated and powerful public opinion can force a change of policy. The present policy of cuts — even if accompanied by the raising of additional tax revenue, from all sources — is not a way out of the present crisis. The establishment's real hope for a way out of the difficulty they endeavour to maintain a closely guarded secret — emigration.

The way out of the present crisis is by way of greatly increased output and greatly increased exports. This means selecting the industries to develop and finding money to finance planned growth. We know that the present system of taxation is grossly unfair and there are other areas where tax can be raised but money from this source — no matter how the screw is turned — is too limited to provide the massive amounts needed to finance investment on a grand scale. Tax revenue now stands at 42% of the Gross National Product.

We increase the size of our Gross National Product when we export, when we replace imports with home produced products. It is, of course, necessary to understand that our products to sell on either the home market or the export market must be as good as and not higher in price than any product of like nature offered for sale in the same market.

If we examine the home market for possibilities for expansion we note that we import about £400 million of food items which we

could very well produce ourselves. Add imports of animal feed which we could produce and a further £300 million can be added.

The bill we paid for imported paper (in 1985 and excluding printed matter) was £265,265,000.

The bill we paid for imported leather shoes (leather topped) in 1985 amounted to £73,072,000.

That piece of arithmetic, listing only a few items, shows how we can earn £1,000 million on the home market alone.

### Lies instead of output

The Gross Domestic Product has not grown at all in the last two years. At the same time productivity per worker is increasing at a rate of 2 per cent a year. In this situation of no growth the number in employment must fall — or more workers can be employed for much less pay.

Rather than face the problems — especially the ideological problems — which serious action to develop the economy would bring, the government resorts to lies and unreal actions, recommendations and "plans".

This is the reasoning behind opposition to pay increases. Opposition to pay increases is elevated to the stature of a "principle". The same lie factory produces "work-experience schemes" and "work-sharing" projects. It is the reasoning behind the "for God's sake start a Co-op" or your own business philosophy now being expressed in ever more strident tones.

The horror this State tries to avoid at all costs is "more State enterprise". This sort of enterprise is vitally necessary if only to supply the missing links in the chain



between raw materials and finished products.

In relation to many production lines, native private enterprise has let us down with a bang and overseas enterprise, while somewhat better at creating new jobs than the native sector, has not come near to providing jobs for all.

Where will we find the investment we need to create the necessary number of new jobs?

### Investment?

The government does not need to make radical new rules to exert pressure on people with money to invest in Ireland. Overseas companies who used to invest here — or, at least, leave their money here — are now taking increased amounts of profits out of the country. (See Table 5).

The first item listed applies in large measure to overseas com-

panies taking out profits. In 1980 this amounted to 11.5 per cent of the value of manufactured exports; by 1985 it was 22 per cent.

Charles Haughey's indignation on overseas companies moving their funds out was a gross political impertinence because the rules which allow overseas companies to take profits freely out of the country were introduced under Fianna Fáil.

Another side of this question never mentioned is that Ireland is used, mostly by American companies, as a means to avoid paying US taxes.

All profits they claim to make in Ireland are not actually made here. They used to talk of a 35 per cent return on investment before ordinary people started to get suspicious about such large returns.

The government should reach agreement with overseas companies to reinvest profits in Ireland. This is

one large area of money for investment which could be tapped.

New US laws in relation to unused money — which may be a part cause of the outflow of US profits — should help the government if it seriously set out to urge such an 'invest in Ireland policy'.

It still makes good economic sense to borrow in order to create profitable enterprise. The Workers' Party has put down plans to develop various areas of the economy. To borrow to finance the development of these areas makes economic sense.

A cook's commonsense will sooner or later push aside the clouds of obscure language with which the establishment attempts to hide the seriousness and scale of the problem. In the meantime a public opinion must be created for investment policies.

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*PROTESTANT and Catholic children attend separate schools in Northern Ireland — one of the principal means by which sectarian division is perpetuated there. JOHN LOWRY, a member of the Northern Ireland Regional Executive of the Workers' Party examines this*

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## UNNATURAL DIVISION

THE BUILDING of working class unity in Northern Ireland is the crucial political objective of our party. In Northern Ireland that division among the working class is nowhere more evident than in the education system, particularly at primary and secondary level; it equally applies to nursery level but because of the policies of Thatcherism we do not have a fully developed nursery sector. From the earliest age our young people are segregated, sent off to different schools to benefit from a mythical "ethos" which proclaims our children to have "distinct and separate values".

It is no exaggeration to state that what operates is a system of educational segregation. The effects of such a divisive schooling are immense. By virtue of the other manifestations of sectarianism in our society, for example sectarian housing ghettos, it is "normal" for young people to go through life from the earliest days of childhood to the brink of adulthood, without having encountered someone of

a different religion.

This archaic system, the product of medieval thinking which unfortunately still prevails, is a major factor in breeding suspicion, mistrust and bigotry between young people in Northern Ireland. Such suspicions can and ultimately do, manifest themselves in the type of sectarian murder and violence which the terrorist gangs have imposed upon the working class of Northern Ireland.

There is no political, economic, social or cultural justification for the policy of educational segregation. This division of our young people is both unnatural and unjust.

Numerous educational studies over the years have pointed to this "unnatural division", and alluded to the "serious and long-lasting detrimental effects". Most recently (Sept. 1986) a major report commissioned by the European Parliament on Northern Ireland, stated "The rapporteur believes that a significant factor in fostering mutual suspicion is

the segregation of children in denominational schools". In reality it is a policy which nurtures sectarianism, perpetuates and institutionalizes sectarian division.

The Workers' Party have for a long time demanded that a fully comprehensive, secular system of integrated education be introduced in Northern Ireland. Chief opposition to such a move stems from the Roman Catholic Church. They preside over and control a large proportion of State funded education (about 45 per cent) in a totally undemocratic manner and without regard to even the most modest demands for reform such as the Astin Report on school management committees.

Their total control over teacher appointments and promotions has been used in the past quite viciously to silence proponents of integrated education. The Chilver Committee Report of 1981 affords an excellent example of how the Roman Catholic Church not only opposed the limited introduction of integrated



education at teacher training level, but also the methods to which they will resort in a most ruthless fashion.

The proposal was a modest one, based in reality upon Tory financial considerations rather than any move towards integrated education. It involved approximately 800 students in third level who would be trained as teachers alongside the State run Stranmillis College.

Yet a campaign of opposition was orchestrated which verged on the hysterical, "a threat to human rights", "a British Imperialist ploy", were typical reactions. Proponents of integrated education were denounced from the pulpit, particularly the Workers' Party and people were told don't vote WP. In an editorial the *Irish News*, for whatever reason, likened the modest proposal to this amazing scenario: "If the West German Government... were to require all Jews to register at local town halls the reaction would be instantaneous and furious."

It is such medieval, bigoted and warped mentalities that maintain segregated education in Northern Ireland.

But those in favour of integrated education have not been intimidated and have not gone away. At the initiative of parents, an integrated secondary school, Lagan College, was established on the outskirts of Belfast in 1981. It now has been granted maintained status by the Department of Education and is flourishing. Five or six smaller integrated but as yet voluntary primary schools have also been established in the last three years and exist as a testimony to the groundswell of support for integration in the community.

Things have also been moving on the political front. In anticipation of the Labour Party forming the next government in Britain, the Workers' Party submitted a 10 point programme to them on how best they could effectively deal with Northern Ireland's problems.

One of these was the call for a comprehensive secular and integrated education system. Peter Archer MP, Labour's chief spokesperson on Northern

Ireland, in a major policy speech outlining a future Labour government's policy (Cambridge, 15.10.86), indicated that a major aim would be "to break down the rigid segregation which dominates the education system".

The report by T.J.Maher, Euro MP, commissioned for the European Parliament, Sept. 86, urged the European Commission "to examine how it could give support to integrated education

projects".

There are many manifestations and monuments to out-dated medieval thinking in Northern Ireland. Our education system is one. The introduction of integrated education will go a long way to making Northern Ireland society more relevant to the modern 20th century in which we live. It will undoubtedly be a long, hard and vicious battle, but one which must be fought.



● *DEPENDING on school pupils' religion in Northern Ireland, they are segregated into different schools.*



THE RECENT general election has set the scenes for an escalating battle between working class interests and the 'fiscal rectitude' of capitalism, argues Des Geraghty, trade unionist and Workers' Party member.

## The fight goes on!

FOR SHEER brass neck, it is difficult to beat Fianna Fáil. Even their long-acknowledged expertise at being 'all things to all people' was more than surpassed on this occasion. Charlie invested a lot of time and energy in cultivating a new and more fashionable image for Fianna Fáil, 'the working-class party'.

No other political leader could have begun an election campaign with a conference of business executives, assuring them of his

commitment to free enterprise and his desire to restore 'business confidence'; then promised the farmers that he would abolish the land tax; and then, without hesitation, launched a crusade to win the working-class vote with an astounding flourish of left-wing rhetoric.

Garret and Fine Gael were dismissed as 'Thatcherite Monetarists'. The PDs were denounced — accurately enough — as the new and sinister extreme right

of Irish politics. We were all assured that the future of the state companies was secure with Charlie and those seeking privatisation were roundly denounced for being unpatriotic and reactionary. Brian Lenihan took his new role so seriously that he wondered why he wasn't invited to the proposed meeting of left-wing TD's after the election. Fianna Fáil was once again sold as the only real friend to whom the building worker could look.

### Promises, promises

The views of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions were described as sensible and progressive by Fianna Fáil spokesperson, and Charlie had no difficulty echoing the sentiments of ICTU President, John Carroll, when he said he "would create an economic forum and make employment the number one national priority".

Even the poor and underprivileged social welfare recipients were promised a bright future once the concerned and sympathetic Charlie Haughey was returned to power. It is a tribute to the political sophistication of Irish voters that this performance did not secure for Charlie the long-awaited overall majority he sought and the desired 'stability' of secure, single-party Fianna Fáil government.

The Workers' Party vote increased substantially in spite of Fianna Fáil promises. The defeat of Haughey's own son in Dublin North-East by Pat McCartan and the triumph of Joe Sherlock in Cork East were a particular blow to the attempts of Fianna Fáil to wean away working class support from the Workers' Party.

The election of MacGiolla, De Rossa, Sherlock and MacCartan was a tremendous victory in the present climate and its importance should not be underestimated by anyone.

It is also notable that the PD's



● Pat McCartan — new Workers' Party TD for Dublin North East.



cynical promise of a 25% standard tax rate failed to produce the desired results for O'Malley and his financial backers and did not give him sufficient votes to become the ultimate power-broker of the new Dáil. The only fundamental change in voting patterns was the shift of the new, right-wing yuppies from Fine Gael to the PD's. A change in the leadership of Fine Gael could reverse some of that trend and confirm once again that the only difference between these parties is in the personality of the leaders.

No sooner had the final results been declared when Charlie became an immediate convert to the fiscal rectitude of Fine Gael. With breathtaking guile, he 'discovered', as did Garret before him, that the financial position was much worse than he had anticipated. He immediately declared that the budget would not differ significantly from that of Fine Gael; and that the "flawed figures" of Garret's government were now, if anything, an under-estimate.

In the true spirit of right-wing economic commentators, there was now no scope for further taxation, but an urgent necessity to make cuts in public expenditure.

### Forget illusions

Now that this general election is over, we can forget any illusions which might have been temporarily created by Charlie's public posturing; and face up to the real political agenda. That agenda has been set already by those who wield political and economic power in this country but who never have to present themselves to the people for election. Their anti-people policies won't be part of any manifesto requiring public approval before being implemented by Charlie or any other leader of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael or the PD's.

The real establishment interests in this country are now determined to achieve cuts in public expenditure, particularly in all forms of social spending; for them, that is the only alternative to paying more tax or accepting lower margins of profit on their financial dealings, their property speculation, or their accumulated wealth. Those who control our economy want to 'roll back the frontiers' of the public sector and confine the state to its

traditional role of ordering and regulating the relationship between the ruling class and those it wishes to exploit.

The demand for cuts in public spending or privatisation is not simply a case of 'balancing the books' of the state, but is an ideologically motivated political policy to restore the dominance of the free market.

It is part of capitalist reconstruction which requires unhindered profiteering, increased opportunities for maximising profits and the ability of capital to achieve the highest returns in an increasingly competitive economic environment. They have many scores to settle with the trade union movement and want people like Ian McGregor and Eddie Shah to tell them how best to accomplish that task.

### Soggy Labour

The modern breed of capitalist in Ireland is no longer interested in spendthrift Fianna Fáil populism, of the soggy social democracy of the Labour Party. It is equally contemptuous of the veneer of liberalism in Fine Gael; and has no interest in the demands of workers for equity and social justice.

Its primary concerns are the removal of obstacles to speculation, trade and commerce, forcing down wages and social costs, achieving maximum flexibility in enterprises and in the money markets.

It will concern itself with ensuring that the ideology of individualism and free enterprise is dominant in education, in the legal system, and in the labour market. It will also seek to use the state to improve the security of their private investments and to guarantee their immunity from serious financial disaster.

The present government will be expected to fulfill the current needs of the capitalist class and increase the economic pressure on the public sector, PAYE taxpayers, trade unions, tenants, the unemployed and all those dependent on social welfare. The political leadership of Haughey will only be tolerated for as long as he delivers the desired results for his political masters. The new-found rhetoric of working class politics will quickly be buried as the rhetoric of fiscal rectitude takes its place.

The ruling class will no longer allow a Tony Gregory, a Jim Kemmy, to even the Labour Party and certainly not the Workers' Party, to control the balance of their power. They know that they already have the ideological balance of power by a large margin and the traditional party divisions will not prevent them from using it. If they need another general election to secure that, they will put up the money for it.

### Fight back

In such a political climate, the determination of the Workers' Party to lead the 'Fight Back' of the working class becomes much more than an election slogan. It is a statement of political intent and a summary of our political agenda. Our Dáil representatives will give expression to our consistent policy of advancing and defending the interests of the working class even in this period of recession and right-wing dominance.

We will continue to be interested in political dialogue and co-operation with serious socialists but have no intention of watering down our class politics to facilitate some nondescript media notion of 'leftism'. Equally, we have no intention of engaging in some follow — the — leader game with the Parliamentary Labour Party, which has yet to demonstrate where it actually stands in the real world of modern capitalism. Leadership of our class will be decided in the class struggle and not in the back rooms of Leinster House.

The 'Fight Back' is now on, both inside and outside Dáil Éireann. Our Party organisation must now be developed to enable us to provide political direction and support everywhere that the working class takes on the task of fighting back against its exploiters. The recent general election was one important element in that struggle but the fight back now requires intensified educational activity, improved organisation, an increased Party membership and intelligent, resourceful leadership at every level of our political struggle.

There is "another way" — but neither Charlie nor Fianna Fáil will now want to know about it. Our job is to prove that the only other way is serious socialism.



200,000 acres of bogland currently provide 7,000 jobs under Bord na Móna control — but peat reserves are running out. PROINSIAS BREATHNACH, lecturer in Economic Geography at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, considers what should be done with

# The bogs down in the valley

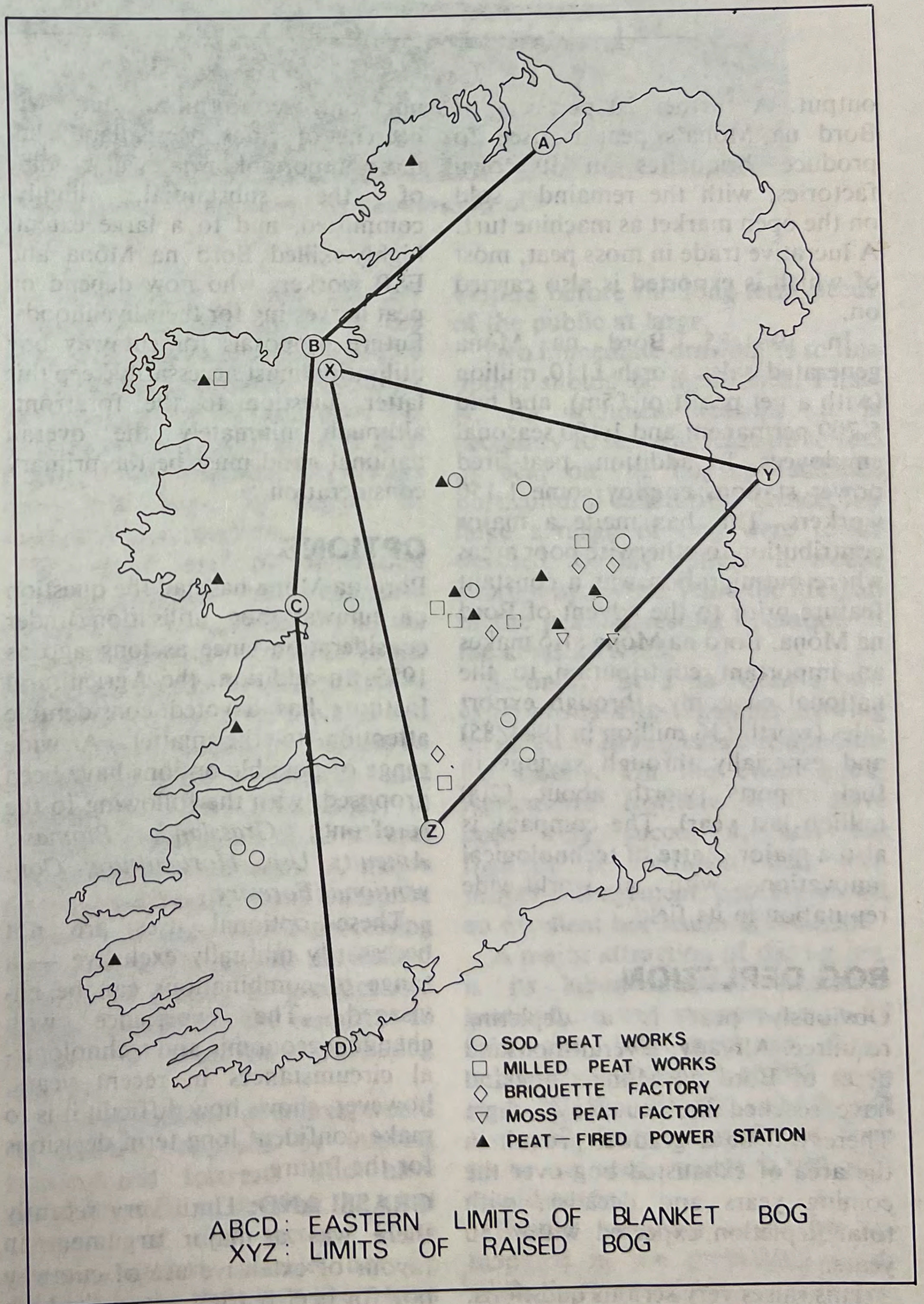
BOGLAND develops where persistent waterlogging prevents complete decay of dead vegetation, which accumulates over time to form peat. Given our wet climate, it is not surprising that bogs are very common in Ireland. In fact, one sixth (some three million acres) of the country's surface is covered in peatland. The bulk of this is found in the western areas, where the climate is wettest, particularly in upland districts. In these areas, the bogs frequently 'blanket' the countryside, with the result that they are of uneven terrain and variable thickness, which for the most part rules them out as regards large-scale mechanised harvesting.

In the low-lying midlands, however, bogs have formed through the in-filling of the extensive lakes left over after the last ice age. These so-called 'raised' bogs are on flat terrain and are often quite deep and extensive in area. These bogs, therefore, have been the main focus of the high-technology harvesting operations of Bord na Móna.

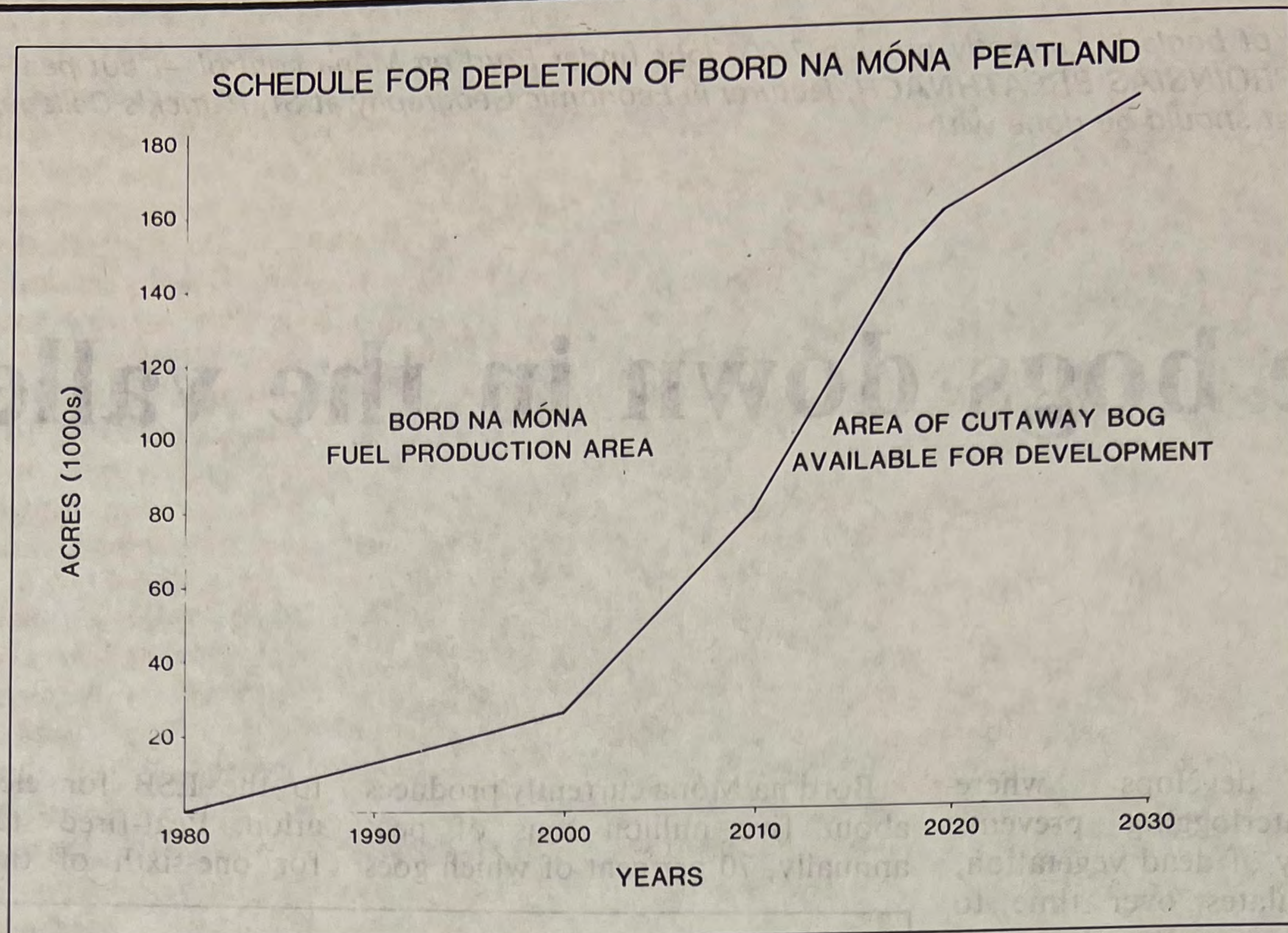
## BORD NA MÓNA

Established in 1946, Bord na Móna is a commercial state-owned company which currently is extracting peat from 200,000 acres of bogland purchased from private landowners. This obviously is only a small fraction of the total amount of peatland in the country, most of which is either completely unused or very poorly used in relation to its economic potential. The company mainly operates in counties Kildare, Offaly, Laois, North Tipperary, Westmeath, Longford and Roscommon.

Bord na Móna currently produces about five million tons of peat annually, 70 per cent of which goes to the ESB for electricity generation. Peat-fired stations account for one-sixth of the ESB's total







output. A further 20 per cent of Bord na Móna's peat is used to produce briquettes in its own factories, with the remainder sold on the open market as machine turf. A lucrative trade in moss peat, most of which is exported is also carried on.

In 1984/85, Bord na Móna generated sales worth £110 million (with a net profit of £5m), and had 5,700 permanent and 1,100 seasonal employees. In addition, peat-fired power stations employ some 1,150 workers. This has made a major contribution to otherwise poor areas where outmigration was a constant feature prior to the advent of Bord na Móna. Bord na Móna also makes an important contribution to the national economy, through export sales (worth £16 million in 1984/85) and especially through savings in fuel imports (worth about £200 million last year). The company is also a major centre of technological innovation, with a world-wide reputation in its field.

### BOG DEPLETION

Obviously peat is a depleting resource. Already, several thousand acres of Bord na Móna's bogland have reached the 'cutaway' stage. There will be a gradual growth in the area of exhausted bog over the coming years and decades, with total depletion expected within 50 years.

This raises very serious questions,

not only concerning what will become of cutaway peatland, but more important, what will become of the substantial, highly-committed, and to a large extent, highly-skilled Bord na Móna and ESB workers who now depend on peat harvesting for their livelihoods. Future proposals for cutaway bog utilisation must necessarily keep this latter question to the forefront, although ultimately the overall national good must be the primary consideration.

### OPTIONS

Bord na Móna has had the question of cutaway bog utilisation under consideration since as long ago as 1955. In addition, the Agricultural Institute has devoted considerable attention to the matter. A wide range of possible options have been proposed, with the following to the forefront: *Grassland; Biomass; Amenity Use; Horticulture; Conventional Forestry.*

These optional uses are not necessarily mutually exclusive — a range of combinations can be envisaged. The experience with changing economic and technological circumstances in recent years, however, shows how difficult it is to make confident long-term decisions for the future.

**GRASSLAND:** Until very recently there was a major argument in favour of extensive use of cutaway bog for beef-rearing, given the high

and guaranteed prices available under the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy. Now, with the dismantling of CAP altogether in prospect, and with huge stocks of beef in cold storage, the case for devoting massive additional acreages to beef production is not nearly as strong. Such an option, it may be added, uses relatively little labour, and thus offers poor prospects for employment creation.

**BIOMASS:** The rapid escalation of fuel prices in the 1970s brought forth the prospect of profitably using cutaway bogland for the cultivation of renewable fuel crops. This so-called 'biomass' option involved fast-growing trees such as willow, alder and poplar which would have their branches lopped off periodically and fed into power stations. Rapid regeneration of branches would allow the original trees to be used over and over again.

The attraction of this option is that it would allow power stations to be kept going, while Bord na Móna's technical expertise could be utilised for the purposes of mechanical harvesting and processing of the biomass crop.

A drawback is the fact that biomass would only provide, at best, a quarter of the fuel output per acre compared with peat, but this could be overcome by developing biomass on the additional expanses of unreclaimed or poorly used peatland to be found in the midlands.





● Bord na Móna has proved adept at developing our peat resources.

The collapse in oil prices in the last year, however, has rendered the biomass option extremely uneconomic at least for the time being.

**AMENITY USE:** Since the Midland bogs were originally lakes, it has been suggested that they should be re-flooded to provide a recreational amenity such as boating and fishing. Dublin's nearby population is seen as the main source of demand for such an amenity. While limited flooding could be envisaged, large-scale resort to this option would not appear to offer great prospects for the creation of steady jobs.

**HORTICULTURE:** A strong case has been made in some quarters for devoting a large proportion of cutaway bogland to the cultivation of vegetables and shrubs. Ireland has a poor past record in this area, due mainly to bad organisation of production and marketing. As a result, not only have we fared poorly in export markets, a growing proportion of the home market is being served by imports.

A large-scale vegetable-growing operation on cutaway bogland offers the potential for producing a well-ordered supply of graded and well-presented fresh product to both

the home and export markets (especially Britain), while at the same time providing a secure source of supply to the domestic vegetable-processing sector. In particular, this would provide a major boost to Erin Foods, whose potential has always been held back by neglect of successive governments.

The poor level of integration between producers and processors was one of the main defects of the Irish food industry identified in the celebrated Telesis Report on Industrial Policy. Poor farm practice and insufficient attention by farmers to developing secure markets are among the key hindrances to Ireland's exploitation of its natural agricultural advantages. A major state-owned horticultural enterprise linked to a state-owned processing operation would provide the desired security of quality of product and supply, along with the resources to mount a realistic marketing exercise.

Such a proposal, of course, would be strongly opposed by existing horticultural interests who have failed dismally to develop the great potential of this sector. These narrow interests should not be allowed to put their own short-term

welfare before the long-term needs of the public at large.

Two immediate drawbacks to this option should be mentioned. Firstly, for technical reasons, it is necessary to leave at least three feet of peat on the bog to facilitate horticultural cultivation. Hence, if a large acreage of bog were to be devoted to this option, it would shorten by several years the lifespan of the peat-harvesting operation in the areas affected.

Secondly, Bord na Móna's own experiments with vegetable-growing on cutaway have yielded disappointing results. On the other hand, Agriculture Institute trials have been very successful, and the Institute is confident that with proper management, peat represents an excellent horticultural medium.

A major attraction of this option is its labour-intensity. Intensive horticulture can support up to 18 jobs per 100 acres in direct cultivation. Thus, if 10,000 acres (out of the 200,000 which will eventually become available) were to be so used, nearly 2,000 jobs would ensue.

Similar numbers could be anticipated in the processing stage, while there would also be consider-



able job-creation in providing inputs. In this respect, the high level of mechanisation which a large-scale horticultural operation would require could provide a continuing outlet for Bord na Móna's technical staff.

**CONVENTIONAL FORESTRY:** At the moment, conventional (that is, non-biomass) forestry appears to present the best possibilities for utilising not only Bord na Móna cutaway, but much of the remaining bogland and other marginal land in the country. There are three reasons for this: firstly, alternative competing uses for most of this land do not exist; secondly, Ireland's climate and soils are extremely suited for rapid tree growth (in comparison with other countries with major forestry industries), and thirdly, massive markets for forest products exist.

The EEC produces less than half of its timber requirements — indeed, timber, after oil, is the second largest item in the Community's import bill. Ireland itself spends nearly £400 million annually on timber imports — most of which could be replaced by home-grown products.

Here is an outstanding example of an undeveloped natural resource. Despite the admirable attempts of the Forest and Wildlife service to expand the national forest area, there is still vast room for expansion. Agricultural Institute research has shown that over 2½ million acres of Ireland's marginal land — much of it peatland — could profitably be devoted to high-output forestry.

A lot of this land at the moment is used for low-intensity livestock rearing, mainly on small farms, and would generate much higher returns in the long run under forestry.

If all 200,000 acres under Bord na Móna control were devoted to forestry some 800 jobs for forestry workers would be provided, along with 250 technical and 125 administrative staff, going on the present structure of employment in the Forest and Wildlife Service. At full output, such an area of forestry would also generate at least 1,000 jobs in downstream processing, giving a total of approximately 2,200 direct jobs.

This falls well short of existing levels of employment in Bord na

Móna and in the peat-fired power stations. However, if the other half million acres of peatland available in the midlands were also to be afforested, then employment losses implied by the exhaustion of Bord na Móna's bogs would be largely cancelled out.

Apart from the direct employment potential of large-scale afforestation, one should consider wider economic ramifications. Timber processing is a major source of added value. Timber in its sawn form is worth *five times* its original value; the added value factor for chipboard is 19 and for paper is 27.

Hence, a major expansion of the native Irish timber industry would have very substantial employment spin-offs as the benefits of this added value circulate through the economy. An important factor here is the low import content of the native timber industry. Also important is the need to keep the industry under indigenous control to prevent leakage via profit repatriation.

In this context, recent reports that Bord na Móna has made approaches to the government for permission to move into the commercial forestry area assume major significance. If this is to be the main use for cutaway peatland, then it is important that planting begin immediately the cutaway becomes available, as it takes up to 15 years for the first output to come on stream.

This move on the part of Bord na Móna could have particular long-term significance. At the moment, the Forest and Wildlife Service operates very inappropriately within a civil service framework. Various reports have emphasised the need to put the administration and development of the state forests under a commercial corporate form of organisation. Bord na Móna, with its existing intimate knowledge of bogland (wherein the great bulk of the state forests are planted), its technical capabilities, and its established corporate structure (which otherwise would have to be dismantled as peat supplies run out), represents an obvious medium to which the future development of this vital resource could be entrusted.

There has been a growing recent campaign to have state forests privatised. One can, therefore, anticipate vociferous objections to

Bord na Móna moving into the forestry area because of the potential implications of such a move. It is vital that this key national resource, already under public control, be developed under such control in the interests of all the people. Efforts at privatisation, therefore must be vigorously resisted.

### WHO SHOULD CONTROL?

There is, of course, already a vociferous farming lobby opposed to Bord na Móna developing cutaway bogland. Farming interests have been calling for some time now for cutaway bog to be divided into family farm units, and sold or leased to existing or aspiring farmers. Arguments against the state developing the cutaway have revolved around usual rhetorical assertions against state companies — that is, inefficiency, loss-making, unenterprising, strike-ridden — even though the very company whose bogland is in question is a living negation of these arguments.

There are many cogent arguments in favour of the state maintaining responsibility for cutaway development:

- cutaway bogs will always need a centralised drainage system. Sub-division of the bogs has inherent dangers where individual farmers not maintaining their own drains could jeopardise their neighbours.
- getting a high level of return from any of the options for cutaway development discussed above requires a very advanced level of technical expertise — much higher than is the norm among existing farming community. A large-scale state-run operation with its own properly staffed technical and scientific centre (such as Bord na Móna has at the moment) offers the best prospects for proper management of a resource which can give high returns when well handled, but which can be a disaster area otherwise.
- Irish farmers have traditionally shied away from cultivation of bogland, regarding it as a nuisance at worst, and as a fuel source at best. Bord na Móna, on the other hand, has built up over the years an intimate knowledge and understanding of the complexities of bog environments — a resource whose advantages should be maximised rather than dissipated.





● A pilot Bord na Móna scheme for carrot production on cutaway bogs.

● development of agricultural uses for cutaway requires very considerable initial capital investment, and a wait of five or six years before reasonable returns begin to materialise. This presents a level of risk and a timescale which is not acceptable to most farmers (and helps explain, partly, why so little effort has been made to reclaim bogland outside the Bord na Móna areas). Afforestation involves a much longer period before payback. The attitude of most farmers to this is already apparent from the very poor response to the existing very generous grant scheme for promoting private forestry.

● with the imminent dismantling of the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy, the future offers the prospect of a low price market environment for agricultural produce. In such a situation, low production costs will be the key to successful market penetration. It is not obvious that the Irish family farm, with its small scale of operation, can survive in such an environment. Cutaway bogs, offering extensive areas of flat land with no internal boundaries, can facilitate a new approach to cost-efficient farming,

involving advanced mechanisation and major economies of scale.

For the future, agricultural policy should be geared, not to preservation of a small farm economy with a poor record of performance, but to maximising output of raw materials upon which to base processing industries. For too long sectional interests have been put before national interest as far as Irish agricultural policy is concerned.

### CONCLUSION

As stated already, it is not possible to say with any certainty what are the best uses to which cutaway bogland can be put in future years, given the variability in economic and technological circumstances. It is perhaps most prudent to opt for a mix of options, and allow for a degree of flexibility to facilitate adaptation to changing conditions.

Most important at this stage is to decide who is to have responsibility for development of cutaway, in order to allow orderly planning to get under way. It is the view of this writer that all uncertainty should be extinguished, and that Bord na Móna should be given a further

mandate to continue to develop Ireland's peatlands in the national interest. This should apply not only to the existing area under its control, but to all other peatland not currently being developed.

Apart from reasons already given, a further main reason for lack of development of Irish peatland is the widespread existence of commonage and uncertainty over ownership rights. Bord na Móna has been able to use its powers of compulsory purchase to slice through these obstacles, to the great benefit of the public at large. It is now time to extend these powers to encompass the remainder of what is otherwise a vast wasted asset.

Within its present peatlands, only continued centralised ownership by Bord na Móna can provide the co-ordinated long-term and flexible planning needed to make the best use of cutaway bogland.

To divide up this land and to do away with Bord na Móna would be to dissipate two major national resources. To keep the two together offers exciting new avenues for economic development in Ireland. It is up to us all to ensure that this is the way things will be.



*WORKERS' Party Vice President and Belfast City Councillor, SEAMUS LYNCH, visited Nicaragua recently. Below he outlines his impressions and examines the web of intrigue behind the US arms sales to Iran to raise funds for 'Contra' terrorists in Central America.*

# THE TRUTH ON NICARAGUA

LAST November, from different parts of the world, people were making their way to Managua to take part in the celebrations of the Nicaraguan people. A small country, struggling for its survival against the military might of the USA, a country newly free and striving to overcome poverty. I was honoured that the Workers' Party would also be present at these celebrations as a tangible gesture of our continuing support and solidarity for these brave people.

Upon arrival at Managua Airport we were warmly greeted by two representatives of the Nicaraguan Government, Fr Fernando Cardinal (Minister of Education) and Tomas Borge (the only surviving founding member of the FLN and a commander of the revolution). The airport lounge was bustling and young Sandinistas were on hand to arrange our transport and accommodation.

The high walls of the lounge were filled with two enormous paintings — one of Cesar Augusto Sandino, the national hero after whom the political movement is named, and Carlos Fonseca, founder of the FSLN, and its central leader until his death in battle against the Somoza dictatorship in November 1976.

It was in July 1979 that a massive popular insurrection overthrew the 46 year dictatorship of the US backed Somoza family. It was led by the FSLN, the Sandinista National Liberation Front, formed in 1961 under the leadership of Carlos Fonesca to push forward the struggle for national independence and against imperialist domination,

which had been championed earlier in the century by Cesar Augusto Sandino. The FSLN campaigned on such issues as agrarian revolution, women's emancipation, revolution in education and culture, and the right to an independent foreign policy.

After a decade of mounting agitation, in 1979 a general strike and a number of bloody battles finally unseated the Somoza family. The FSLN created the National Reconstruction Government Junta, made up of people from all sectors of society.

### Many parties

Given the abusive propaganda put out by the USA about Nicaragua, it is worth considering the democratic record of the FSLN. They opted for a system of political pluralism and conducted elections in 1984 based on this principle, elections observed and pronounced as fair and democratic by a wide range of international politicians from all political backgrounds.

As well as electing Daniel Ortega as President, these elections returned 96 members to a National Assembly for a term of six years. In the elections there was a turn-out of

75.4 per cent — the results are outlined in Table 1.

The Nicaraguan electoral system was designed to favour the smaller parties which, in many other systems, would have been unable with such small votes, to get any representation in the Assembly.

All seven Parties had contested the presidential elections as well and their six unsuccessful presidential candidates were all given National Assembly seats. Two things were dramatically clear as a result of these elections — the democratic nature of the Nicaraguan revolution, and the overwhelming support of the people, expressed through this democracy, for the FSLN.

The newly elected Assembly has since been engaged in drawing up a new constitution for the country through a system of drafting and consultation and re-drafting. As well as all the political parties, organisations representing trade unions, women, youth, business interests and many others are all involved in considering the detail of the Constitution, article by article, and points being raised are being taken on board and amendments

**Table 1: Results of Nicaraguan General Election 1984**

Party	Per Cent	Seats (96)
Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)	67.0	61
Democratic Conservative Party (PCD)	14.0	14
Independent Liberal Party (PLI)	9.6	9
Popular Social Christian Party (PPSC)	5.6	6
Communist Party of Nicaragua (PCdeN)	1.5	2
Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN)	1.3	2
Marxist-Leninist Popular Action Movement (MAP-ML)	1.0	2





● A recent protest in defence of Nicaragua outside the US embassy in Dublin. Richard Keelan, an Irish missionary priest, joins Charles Liteky, a former US army chaplain in Vietnam, and Workers' Party TD Proinsias De Rossa.

made.

### Terror attacks

Throughout this entire process, it must be pointed out, the Nicaraguan people have been subjected to unremitting terrorist attack from the US sponsored 'Contra' groups. From 1980 to February 1986 this war had claimed 12,000 victims. More than 4,000 were killed, 4,500 wounded, 3,000 kidnapped and 120,000 displaced. Despite this escalating campaign of terror and subversion, Nicaragua has demonstrated a resolute commitment to democracy.

Through all the threats and pressure, the task of reconstruction, of building a new way of life, goes on. Schools exist where they never were before, hospitals and medical care is being improved, and in the coffee plantations, the peasants now work on land which they own. Young and old alike, the workers are amazingly knowledgeable and politically aware. They talk eagerly about their struggle, the economic tasks facing them, the defence of their revolution, the problems of world peace.

As part of the democratic process, President Daniel Ortega and other government leaders meet regularly, every Saturday morning,

with different groups of people from all walks of life in Nicaragua. The agenda ranges from everyday problems faced by the people to issues of foreign policy. President Ortega, I was told, had attended at least 240 such meetings.

The issue of education is looked upon as one of the utmost importance in Nicaragua. The Somoza years had left a legacy of illiteracy and one of the first steps taken following the revolution was the launching of a National Literacy campaign in 1980. In the first phase of this campaign more than 400,000 people learned to read and write. The campaign has now reduced the level of illiteracy to well below the level in many industrialised, capitalist, so-called 'developed' countries.

### Priests in Cabinet

Religion is one issue which cannot but strike any visitor to Nicaragua forcibly. I have already mentioned that we were greeted at the airport on our arrival by the Minister of Education, Fr Fernando Cardenal, a Jesuit priest. At a social function held after the main celebratory parade, when the National Directorate of the FSLN entertained and mixed freely with all their guests from abroad, one of the most

striking figures present was the Minister of Culture, Fr Ernesto Cardenal, brother to Fernando and also a Jesuit priest.

There are, in fact, three priests in the Cabinet. The majority of the Nicaraguan people are Catholic, and many Christians played a leading and active role in the FSLN revolution, a role which is reflected by the presence of these men at the centre of the revolutionary government.

If that is a surprise, however, the attitude and behaviour of the Hierarchy of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua strikes an altogether more familiar and more depressing note. The most senior member of that Hierarchy, Cardinal Obando, openly supports the Contras, President Reagan's "freedom fighters". When he was made Nicaragua's first ever Cardinal by the Pope in May 1985, Obando stopped off in Miami on his way home from Rome so that he could say his first mass as Cardinal to hundreds of these terrorists, including Adolfo Calero and Arturo Cruz, leaders of the FDW (Contras).

The openly declared aim of these groups is to destroy the Nicaraguan revolution. Obando has found,



however, that he has been unable to convert religious authority into political authority over the masses. The hierarchy has failed to gather significant popular support for the counter-revolution despite its best efforts. On the contrary, their open identification with the US aggression has decreased the Church's influence in Nicaragua and separated them from large numbers of their own members, as evidenced by the Jesuits in the Government, who have remained resolute in their support for the revolution.

During the latter part of 1986, President Daniel Ortega, together with other members of the FSLN leadership, have been working hard with church representatives in order to arrive at an overall agreement that would put an end to the so-called "church-state confrontation". This change of direction by the hierarchy is partly due to the progressive defeat within Nicaragua, both militarily and politically, of the counter-revolution and the consolidation of the gains of the revolution.

This has demonstrated to Obando, the Hierarchy and to the Vatican that the Sandinista revolution will not be easily destroyed and that the credibility and future of the church in Nicaragua depends on their reaching some accommodation with it. The revolutionary government themselves are clear regarding their attitude to religion. The Minister of Education, Fr Fernando Cardenal, when asked about this, said bluntly "As Minister of Education I am responsible only for the education of Nicaraguans. Their religion is a matter for the churches."

### Many surprises

The central part of the visit to Nicaragua was on Saturday, November 8th, when the 25th anniversary of the founding of the FSLN was celebrated, and the death of Carlos Fonseca commemorated by a huge parade and rally in Carlos Fonseca Plaza.

Along the route to the Plaza thousands of Nicaraguans were waving banners in the red and black colours of the FSLN. Seated on a stand overlooking the square we had an impressive view of the 250,000 people gathered there.

Anyone who travels to Nicaragua with stereotyped, preconceived

notions of what they will find is due for many surprises. The first speaker to the massed crowds on this prestigious public platform was a former United States soldier in Vietnam, Brian Wilson. He had been part of a 48 day Fast For Life in support of peace in central America and he warned of the threat which existed of the US turning Nicaragua into the Vietnam of the '80s. Speaker followed speaker, with support from over 80 countries and liberation movements indicating the extent of worldwide solidarity with the Sandinistas in their struggle.

The key speech was from President Daniel Ortega. He spoke of the establishment of "people's power", and the flowering of democracy in Nicaragua and reviewed the progress of the revolution. On foreign policy he spoke in favour of non-alignment and nuclear disarmament. "Peace demands humanity's greatest efforts," he said in acknowledging "the extraordinary efforts made by the Soviet Union in the interests of Peace."

In this instance a recent statement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union contrasts sharply in tone and content with statements from Washington. It said in part:

"In order to justify its line of force against Nicaragua the American Administration uses a false thesis about the 'Soviet-Cuban infiltration which threatens US security and the countries of Central America'. At the same time the USA imposes the idea on its allies that the instability in Central America and the Caribbean basin through which Western Europe is supplied with the American military materials and fuel in case of a global conflict, might have a negative impact on the US capability to 'defend them from the Soviet military threat'."

### Tense situation

The statement went on: "The CPSU and the Soviet Government condemn resolutely the interventionist actions by Washington against Nicaragua which only aggravates an already tense international situation, puts new obstacles in the way of clearing the atmosphere in international relations. It is completely clear to us that the idea of the Latin American

solution of the crisis in Central America should not and must not be seen through the prism of "East-West" confrontation.

"That's why we support the initiatives by the Contadora group and the group of support which aimed at the political settlement of the situation in Central America, at achieving peace and security of the Central American peoples. It is needless to state that the Soviet Union has... no military presence there and we do not have any plans on that score."

The recent revelations concerning the sale of arms by the US to Iran have also concerned Nicaragua. It is highly revealing the line-up in the Irangate scandal with new facts being revealed daily. In its efforts to destabilise and overthrow the legitimate Sandinista Government of Nicaragua, the US has made use of surrogate regimes throughout the world, most notably the White Racist Regime of South Africa, and the Zionist Regime of Israel. Since the State of Israel was established, it has played an essential and critical role in assisting the US to maintain its power and influence in key areas of the world. The Zionists have supplied arms and technology to some of the most repressive and brutal regimes in the world such as Pinochet's Chile and Somoza's Nicaragua.

In fact, before Somoza's downfall, Israel was supplying over 90 per cent of his arms needs. An Israeli newspaper, 'Ha' Art' stated last year Israel continued supplying arms to Somoza until the last days of his downfall. Among weapons supplied were Galil rifles which were supplied direct to a special terrorist unit headed by Somoza's son. This terrorist gang was responsible for assassinating Somoza's political opponents and its victims included many women and children.


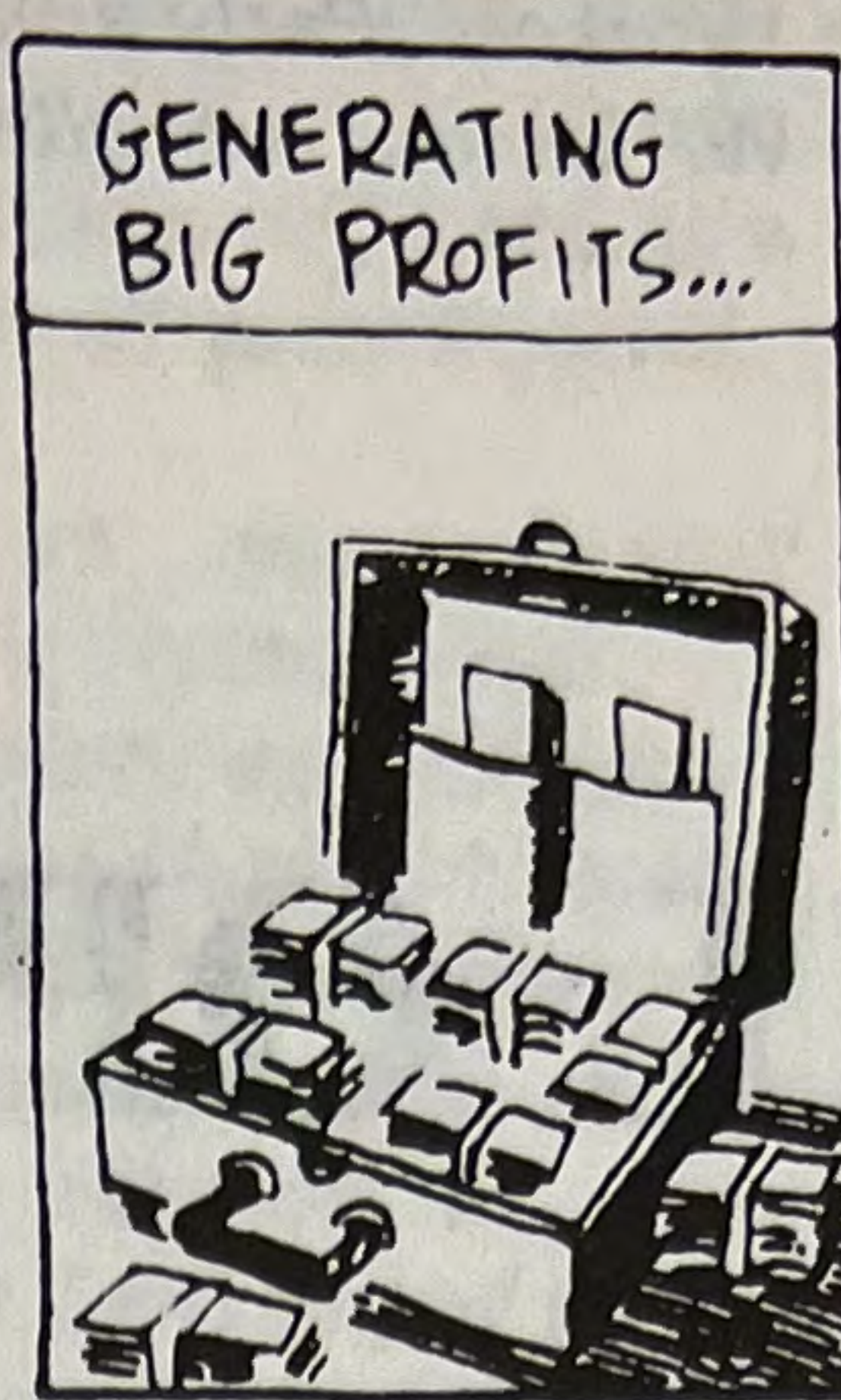
Israel Shahak, Professor at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, pointed out: "This fact assumes great importance if we recall that in the last two years alone, the Somoza regime killed about 50,000 people or that his regime bombed the poverty slums of Managua as well as other towns, mainly with Israeli made Arava and West Wind Planes."

### Iran arms

This policy against the Nicaraguan revolution has continued with Israel supplying on



FOREIGN  
POLICY  
REFRESHER

behalf of Washington, arms it had captured in Lebanon from the PLO to the Contras. Israeli mercenaries have also been involved in training Contras at a salary of \$10,000 a month.

It is in the recent shipment of US arms to Iran that other enemies of Nicaragua have been exposed. Ranging from the Sultan of Brunei who contributed \$10 million to the Contras and to the puppet regimes of Taiwan and South Korea, to the reactionary Aytollah Regime in Iran and the Zionists in Tel Aviv, the list grows longer every week.

Combined with their overlords' power in Washington, it all demonstrates very clearly the immense task the people of Nicaragua have to face.

Israel's role in the sale of arms to Iran is worthy of examination for it seems clear now that much of Washington's foreign policy is being formulated and at times dictated by the Zionists. Part of this policy obviously has a connection with the Iran-Iraq war. Certainly of the two combatants Israel has most to fear from a strong united Iraq of all the Arab countries, with an Iraqi army hardened and steeled in war poses

the greatest threat to the Israeli Army and the Zionist regime. The involvement of the US in helping to prolong the Iran-Iraq war and also assist the Iranians has been exposed with the disclosure that Washington furnished false information to the Iraqis and also at Israel's insistence supplied accurate details gathered by satellite to the Iranian regime.

It would be comical except for the tragic consequences to learn that when the US ostensibly 'sold' the arms to Israel for sale to Iran, the Israelis upped the price by many more millions to cover their end of the deal. So much for helping out their friends in Washington!

For decades now Israel has through a policy of terror, denied the Palestinian people their just rights, invaded and occupied Lebanon, aided and condoned the massacre of thousands of Palestinian refugees. Iran through the regime of the Aytollahs has slaughtered thousands of its own people in prisons, sacrificed almost a million in a senseless war and brought the country back into the dark ages.

Its public and hysterical anti-US campaign has been exposed more

than once as a sham. The *Washington Post* reported last year that the CIA submitted a list of Tudeh Party activists to the Khomeini Regime which executed some hundred Tudeh Party members and imprisoned many more.

In other places and situations the Iranian regime also plays its part in assisting Washington. Along with the reactionary Moslem military dictatorship of General Zia in Pakistan which acts as Washington's main agent in its fight against the progressive government of Afghanistan, the Islamic Regime in Teheran aids the counter revolutionaries of Afghanistan with arms, finance and safe bases.

The ongoing debate and investigation into the Irangate scandal will help to expose to many more millions of people the nature and scope of enemies the Nicaraguan people and indeed progressive people all over the world face. For us in the Workers' Party we must make it clear that we will do all we can to assist the people and government of Nicaragua to defeat their enemies and help secure freedom and peace for the people of Nicaragua.



*JUST how close the policies of Fianna Fáil and former Coalition government are can be seen from their reaction in a Dáil debate on Dec. 2nd 1986 to a Workers' Party amendment to allow the government the option to control building society rates. It showed the WP as the real alternative during five years of Fianna Fáil's*

# LOYAL OPPOSITION

**Proinsias De Rossa (Workers' Party):** Section 3 of this Bill enables the Minister of the day to make regulations permitting building societies to advance bridging finance. Nowhere in his Bill is there power taken by the Minister to control the rates being charged by building societies. In fact, in one particular section the Minister specifically excludes himself from controlling such rates. In this section it says the Minister may make conditions other than conditions in relation to the rate of interest chargeable on a loan. If we are serious about controlling and regulating activities of building societies, the question of the rates they charge is one of the key areas.

It seems extraordinary that in the Bill before us the Minister is not taking that power and in relation to the advancing of bridging loans is specifically excluding himself from taking power to control interest rates. If one were to ask any person who has a mortgage their greatest concern about building societies they would say it is the amount of money they have to pay out every month and the substantially increased amount of money they are going to have to pay as a result of an arbitrary increase in rates by the building societies.

That is the reason I have tabled this amendment.

It is to delete the proposal that the Minister may not take power to control the rates the building societies may charge on a bridging loan or other type of loans — power which he might be able to give them under this section as it stands.

After all the hullabaloo about this

Bill and the row kicked up by the building societies and by the Minister about what he was and was not going to do to trim their sails, it is extraordinary that the Minister is excluding himself specifically from controlling the interest rates.

**Minister for the Environment (John Boland):** *I am not prepared to accept either of these amendments. Their effect would be to assign to the Minister of the day direct control over the rates being charged by building societies. As the House knows that would be contrary to the long established policy of successive Governments and contrary to the practice which has been engaged in normally in relation to financial institutions.*

*If these amendments were to be accepted the effect could be to seriously undermine savers' confidence in the building societies in that they might feel the Government of the day might for whatever reason move to control rates. What one must hope for is that the societies will act responsibly and cast their rates in accordance with the market forces rather than in any other way.*

**Proinsias De Rossa:** I have to disagree with the Minister. The amendment in no way tries to restrict market forces. It would require a much more extensive Bill and a much larger change of face in this House to achieve that. What my amendment seeks to do is simply exclude the Minister's own statement in the Bill that he can make conditions for the advancing of bridging loans other than in relation

to the rates being charged.

Simply by deleting the proposal I am talking about, the Minister would have the option that, if at some time in the future the building societies were acting in a way which he or the Government of the day considered to be contrary to the common good, he would have the power to say "no".

It would be an important power for the Minister, the Government or any future Government to have. This is the least this House can do when householders are faced with massive mortgage increases over the next few weeks. At the end of the day the question is who runs the country, the financial institutions or this House.

**John Boland:** *The most important power the Minister has under the section is that he may prescribe conditions and the types of loans, secured or unsecured, which the societies may from time to time be allowed offer. If there were to be widespread abuse by certain societies of the powers which might be extended to them by a Minister from time to time by regulation made under this section, it would be open to the Minister to amend the regulations or, perhaps, to withdraw the facility made available to the society to advance that type of loan.*

*In their submission on the Government discussion document the Irish Building Societies Association said: "There is no reason why this finance should not be offered within the building society system and at a substantial cost saving to the house-buyer." In that connection they were referring to bridging finance. I*



do not want to enter into a wider discussion of the section, but it is wrong for the Deputy to suggest that this section is included to allow the societies to make available loans for bridging finance purposes.

The section, as drafted, allows the Minister to make regulations after consultation with the Minister for Finance and the registrar in relation to different categories of loans for different purposes which the societies might be allowed make available to their members.

**Ray Burke (Fianna Fáil):** It is interesting to note that the Minister's first contribution on Committee Stage was that he was not taking any power onto himself to control these market forces. I accept that. I believe it would not be possible. I agree with the Minister's position on the amendment proposed by The Workers' Party.

If the Irish people at some future stage wish to go for total left wing ideology, that will be a different kettle of fish but, as long as market forces prevail, the rights of the savers have to be protected. It was interesting that in his first response on Committee Stage the Minister recognised the limitations and the powers he has as Minister for the Environment.

**Proinsias De Rossa:** The Minister mentioned my reference to the fact that this section proposed to enable building societies advance bridging finance. I made the point that I understood the section was broader than that, but I understood that was his primary purpose.

The point of my amendment is that the Minister should have power in relation to the advancing of bridging finance and, under section 9, in relation to the rates chargeable by the building societies in general, and that he should have power to control those rates. I wish it were possible to introduce left wing ideology by a simple amendment like this — but it is not. This is far from being a left wing ideological proposal. The proposal is simply that the Minister should not deny himself the right to control interest rates.

I want to remind the House that this Government operated price control until very recently. There can be all sorts of debates as to how effective it was or was not. I know

that, for instance, the Consumers Association of Ireland are quite concerned about the manner in which prices have been affected as a result of abolition of price control.

**John Boland:** In my opening remarks I outlined its purposes.

At that time I went on to criticise the level of increase that had recently been announced. I still adhere to those views. I was asked in public several times in relation to those increases whether I envisaged taking on the power, on behalf of the Government, directly to control interest rates. I said clearly at that time that would not be my intention.

It would be prudent to endeavour to control that end of the market when financial institutions do not have the rates which they offer controlled by them.

I repeat the views I expressed some weeks ago when the building societies announced the scale of the increase that it was my belief that sanity and reason would return to the financial market place in a relatively short space of time and that by early in the New Year we would see a sharp reduction again in interest rates charged generally, not just by building societies but in the financial marketplace — rates on offer and rates charged.

**Proinsias Dr Rossa:** I hope I did not give the impression of being disingenuous. My point in relation to section 3 is that the Minister is specifically excluding himself from having the power to control the rates on bridging finance or other kinds of finance that the building societies may be enabled to advance under the provisions of that section. The Minister, in specifically doing that, is denying himself the power. The deletion of the words I propose to delete leaves it open to him to control rates if he or his Government so desire, taking all of the circumstances into account.

In one sense the Minister has strengthened my case in his last remarks, that it is his belief that in the New Year interest rates will level off, that in his view there was no need for them to apply the increases they did. Surely it makes sense that, if the Minister had power to control interest rates he could, at the same time as expressing his view, say to the building societies: "Look, I have this power to control these

rates if I choose and, unless you agree either to a reasonable increase or none, depending on the circumstances, then I will use that power."

Now when we have the opportunity to do something about them, we funk it.

**Jim Tunney (Fianna Fáil):** I will take up the last unparliamentary comment made by Deputy De Rossa. I ask him to clarify how he would see his amendment operating? If we give to any Minister the right to control the interest rates at which a building society can loan money, we also give him the right to control the deposit rates. I do not know whether he would like to see a society where both controls would prevail.

**Ray Burke:** I support the views of my colleague, Deputy Jim Tunney. It was interesting to hear the Minister again trotting out his hoary old chestnut of the big bad wolf of one society leading the way with an announcement and the innocents in the remaining societies despite their best wishes, having to follow in regard to an increase in interest rates. The reality which is well known is that the increase in interest rates is not a result of any of the societies, of their own free will, wanting to increase them. It is a result of the market forces which the Minister spoke about, the market forces caused by the Government and the mishandling of the finances of the State by the Government. That is what has driven interest rates up not only for mortgage holders but for all sections of the community. Interest rates are now over four times the rate of inflation.

The money which is made available on loan does not belong to the building societies; it belongs to the people who invest with the building societies at competitive interest rates. The investors, numbering in excess of one million, make their money available so that 135000 people can have a roof over their heads. It is worth reflecting on that figure. It was wrong to create the impression, like Deputy De Rossa, that by the stroke of a pen it is possible to restrict the mortgage rate.

I disagree with the view of Deputy De Rossa that we were prepared, to use what Deputy Tunney described as an unparliamentary word, to



*funk the opportunity to trot behind him in support of his vote-catching amendment.*

*We are here to defend mortgage holders and we are doing that by trying to change the Government and bring in an administration that will create an economic climate that will lead to interest rates falling to European levels.*

**Proinsias De Rossa:** I am not aware that the word "funk" is an un-parliamentary term.

**John Boland:** It is from 15 minutes ago.

**Proinsias De Rossa:** I am arguing for the right of the Minister to control interest rates if he, or his successors, choose to do so in whatever circumstances may arise in the future. That could arise tomorrow. The State has all types of controls on the free market forces that operate here. The simplest comparison is price control which we had up to recently. The country did not become a socialist State or a socialist society in the years when price control existed.

The building societies like to portray themselves as mutual societies acting in the interest of the savers and mortgage holders but building societies in 1985 made a profit of £30 million. The building societies will argue they need that money but the Minister and the Government have a wider responsibility than to the investors or mortgage holders of any company or building society. The ordinary man and woman in the street have to pay interest to create those large profits. It is for that reason I am suggesting that the Minister should have this power.

**John Boland:** I should like to thank the Deputy for his advice which was interesting. The various provisions of the Bill do more in real terms to help and protect the interests of the borrower than the Deputy's amendment. That amendment could have most serious consequences for the long term viability of societies. Implicit in it is an effort to assign to Government greater power, the power to control interest rates on the financial markets generally.

*The simple fact is that we are an*

*open economy and despite all the political statements we have heard this afternoon, our interest rates are affected extraordinarily by the prevailing rates in our nearest neighbouring country. If a Government were to seek to control interest rates here in regard to societies it could only do so after consideration of the rates payable on the London money market and we all know how ridiculous a proposition that would be. There is no point in a Government taking on powers which they could not exercise in the way the Deputy presumes.*

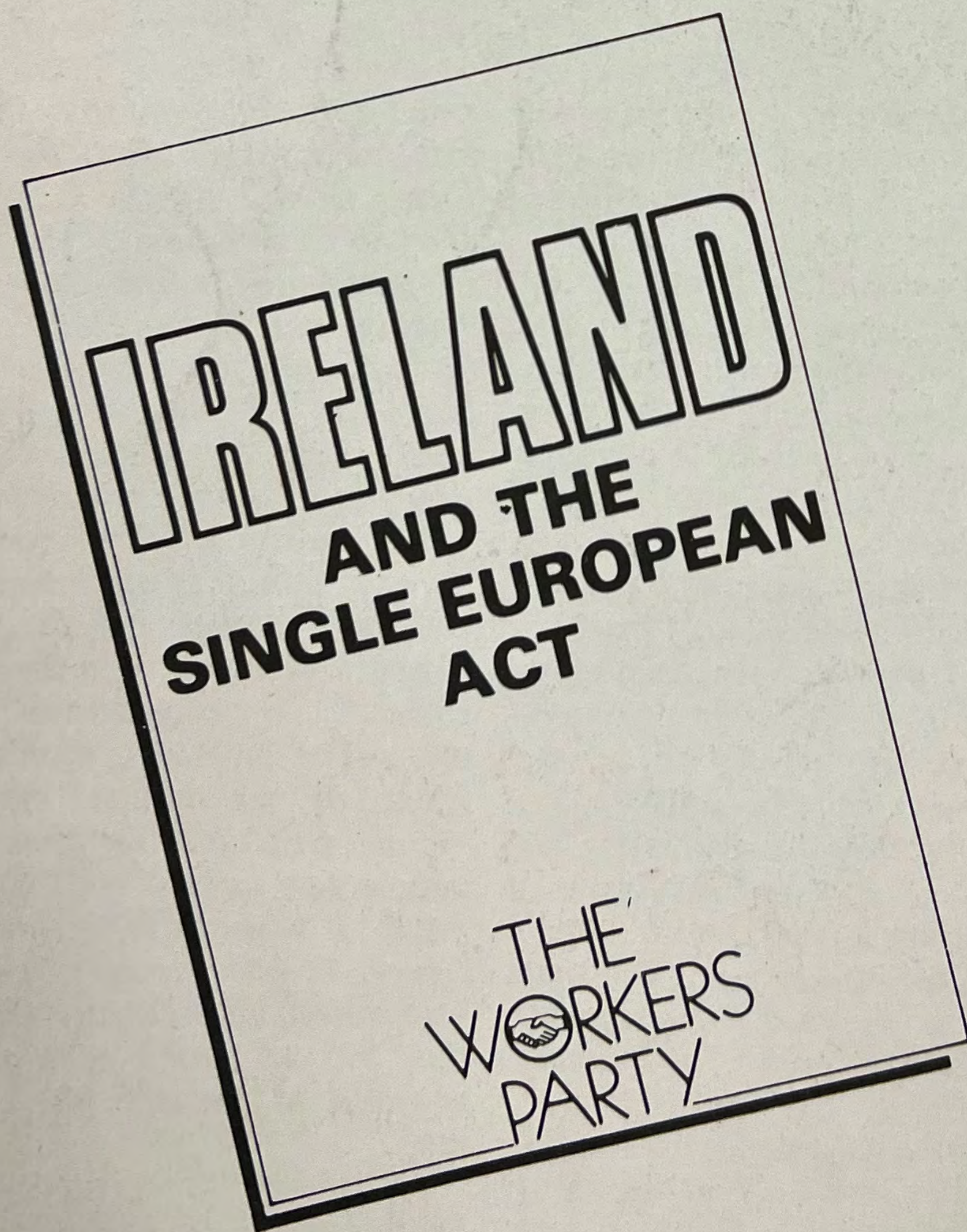
*Question put: "That the words proposed to be deleted stand."*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** Will those who are demanding a division please rise in their places?

*Deputies De Rossa and Mac Giolla rose*

**An Ceann Comhairle:** As fewer than ten Deputies have risen, in accordance with Standing Orders I declare the question carried.

Amendment declared lost.



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